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USE OF FIELD SUPERVISORS AS COLLEGE RECRUITMENT
REPRESENTATIVES FOR UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
BY
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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

The Department of Agriculture is a far-flung organization. It covers the nation like the dew covers Dixie. There are over 10,000 field stations in the United States, the Territories and foreign countries. No Department of the United States Government affects the lives of as many people as the Department of Agriculture.

The Department employs many different kinds of scientific and technical people. With the exception of engineers and chemists, most of these come from the Land Grant Colleges and Universities. Much of the Department of Agriculture's work is conducted in cooperation with the Land Grant Colleges, particularly research work and the making available of the results of research to the people of the United States through the Federal-State Extension Service.

Like all governmental agencies we have long been concerned with how we could best make known the needs of the Department for personnel and how we could best interest the most desirable people in employment with the Department.

In 1936 a Joint Land Grant College-Department of Agriculture Committee on Training for Government Service was appointed by the Secretary of Agriculture. From that time on it has worked under the Chairmanship of the Director of Personnel of the Department. Through this Joint Committee the Department has had the opportunity to make recommendations to the Agricultural Colleges on the educational background, training, and courses needed to provide the best equipped and most useful employees to the Department. The Colleges also are kept informed of employment trends, occupational opportunities for college trained people, and methods of recruitment. The Joint Committee meets twice a year, usually in the Office of the Director of Personnel of the Department in Washington, D. C.

The operations of the Joint Committee through the years set the stage for the next step which came about some time after the Department of Agriculture accepted the responsibility delegated to it by the United States Civil Service Commission to conduct examinations for positions peculiar to the Department. It then became apparent that the usual and customary means of advertising examinations could and should be supplemented in other ways. So we in the central personnel office of the Department sat down with the personnel officers and program administrative officials of our agencies and selected Department program officials in each state and in the territories of Hawaii, Alaska, and Puerto Rico to be recruiting representatives for the Department of Agriculture in the State or territory where they had their official headquarters. These recruiting representatives were usually state directors or other top level field officials who were responsible for different programs of the Department in the area. They often had their headquarters in the same town as the state agricultural college, sometimes on the campus. These people were chosen because of their interest in personnel administration and in the activities of the Department generally and because of their effectiveness in dealing with the public. Representation in each state varied, for example, in 1953 in Alabama it was a State Conservationist, in Arkansas a State Director of Farmers Home Administration, in Arizona a Forest Supervisor, and so forth.

Early in the fall of each year all the recruiting representatives are furnished informational material on the recruitment needs, including as much specific

information as possible on number, location, and types of positions to be filled. Last year they were sent the following material:

Special Notice to Recruitment Representative (outlining the program, his duties, information about each examination open or to be announced, and suggestions)

Agriculture Handbook #45 "Career Service Opportunities in the United States Department of Agriculture"

Employment Opportunities in the Department of Agriculture for Senior and Graduate College Students

Suggested press release regarding Junior Agricultural Assistant Examination

Supply of examination announcements pertinent to the particular state and admission cards

This material may be supplemented from time to time during the year with current and more specific information. The chief duty of the recruiting representative is to contact college officials and students in his state regarding employment opportunities in the Department and particularly to encourage their participation in the Junior Agricultural Assistant and other examinations from which the Department recruits.

Each representative is asked to make a report to the Director of Personnel at the conclusion of his year's activity, together with any suggestions for the conduct of future programs. These reports give the Director of Personnel information on what the Department gets in the way of competition from other sources in the way of higher salaries, and broader opportunities, criticisms of the Department which need to be overcome in planning an examining and recruitment campaign, and indicated changes in the development and publicizing of the examinations themselves.

In addition to the informative reports which help us in keeping abreast of conditions and developments in different sections of the country, there are other important advantages to this type of program. Group discussions and personal interviews with college students and faculty members prove most valuable to the Department in our relations with the colleges and the public. The rotation system affords an opportunity to a larger number of field officials to gain experience in our relations with the colleges and to broaden their knowledge of the overall work of the Department of Agriculture. Finally, and most important of all, we believe that the plan results in participation in our examining program of an increased number of well qualified college graduates.

Another significant development of wide interest is the effort being made to evaluate some of our examining programs to determine the extent to which they are meeting recruitment needs. An outstanding example is a study now in progress of the Junior Agricultural Assistant examination.

The first attempt to study this problem took the form of a questionnaire which was sent out by the Office of Personnel to all competitors in the 1950 Junior Agricultural Assistant examination. The purpose of this questionnaire was to find out in some detail about the college background of the applicants in an effort to

learn more about the persons who applied for the examination and to determine important factors which should be taken into consideration in planning future examination programs. Response to the questionnaire was surprisingly good, and subsequent analysis of the data disclosed some very significant findings. This study provided significant information about the people applying for admission in the Junior Agricultural Assistant program as well as the test material being used for their selection. Although the study was definitely limited in scope, it suggested numerous areas which might have future application or at least would bear further investigation.

A natural outgrowth of the 1950 study was a project which promises to be one of the most significant of its kind. The plan involves cooperative study of the problem with the Land-Grant Colleges, the Department of Agriculture, and the Civil Service Commission over a minimum period of 5 years.

In brief, the plan covers:

1. a comparison, by means of the Junior Agricultural Assistant test, of Land Grant College seniors as a whole with that segment of them who apply for the entrance level professional positions in the Department of Agriculture
2. an attempt to determine the kinds of people who take jobs as a result of the Junior Agricultural Assistant examination
3. an attempt to determine the differences between students who return to farm work and those who accept other employment in the field of agriculture with particular attention being given to those who accept government positions.

The plan received special attention from the Joint Land-Grant College-Department of Agriculture Committee on Training for Government Service, and was approved by the Land-Grant College Association Senate.

This plan called for an experimental test to be given to all available seniors in the Land-Grant Colleges who would be eligible for any of the Junior Agricultural Assistant options. In addition to the regular Junior Agricultural Assistant test, a traits questionnaire about the background of the individual and his attitudes was given. A follow-up directly with the student is to be made each year for a minimum of 5 years. Generally that will be concerned with (a) kind of employment the student accepted, (b) degree to which he may be satisfied or dissatisfied with that line of employment, and (c) something of his chances for advancement. This may be revised as analysis each year indicates.

We hope that the findings from this study will enable the Civil Service Commission and the Department of Agriculture to:

1. Direct recruiting efforts toward people most likely to be interested in Government employment;
2. Improve the current examining program by adding examining devices that will measure pertinent areas of personal characteristics not now covered in the examination; and
3. Develop ultimately a personal criterion device that will make possible large scale evaluation of job proficiency.

Initial tests were administered by a total of 26 Land-Grant Colleges participating in the study in the Spring of 1954. Over 1400 students voluntarily took these tests. A comprehensive analysis of the results is now in process and all those who cooperated in the study will be kept advised of the findings and future developments. This project is receiving considerable attention from various sources. We have reason to expect that it will provide valuable information for all of us who are cooperating in it and lead to further studies of this kind.

These arrangements we feel have greatly improved the relations which the Department has with its sources of supply for personnel, and we confidently believe they will be further improved with additional experience. These are examples of our continual search for ways to improve our relations with those with whom we deal and at the same time improve the quality of new employees being brought into the Department of Agriculture.

